

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY



MIP

FREDERIC LAWRENCE KNOWLES





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ORIGINAL POETRY

BY

FREDERIC LAWRENCE KNOWLES



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A Book of Poems



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On Life's Stairway

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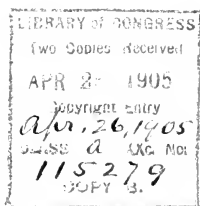
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Professor C. C. Winchester

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For the privilege of reprinting the verses entitled "The Wings" and "The Sculptor," the writer[†] is indebted to the courtesy of *The Christian Endeavor World*. He also wishes to thank the *Century Magazine* for the opportunity of including the lines entitled "Roses."

CONTENTS.



	PAGE
NATURE AND LIFE.	
NATURE: THE ARTIST	1
MASQUES	2
A PASTURE	3
TO THE AMERICAN POET	5
WITH A COPY OF KEATS	7
AN APRIL MOOD	8
TILDY IN THE CHOIR	9
CASTLES IN SPAIN	12
THE RAINBOW BAG	14
ONE OCTOBER	16
SEASONS	18
THE MODERN RUTH	19
WANTED: A BOOK OF TRAVELS!	20
TO A POET WHO LIVES IN THE PAST	21
LITTLE REBECCA	23
COLUMBIA	25
TO THE MADONNA	27
TREES IN WINTER	28
GRIEF AND JOY	29
LOVE'S NEST	30
THE MOON AND THE GIRL	31

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE BOATMAN: SLEEP	33
WHEN THE GREAT POET COMES	34
A PATRIOT'S HYMN	36
THE GALLEON	38
THE VISION	39
ROSES	40
GOLDIE	41
A BIRTH SONG	43
LOVE'S PRAYER	44
THAT FUTURE DAY	45
TO AMERICA	47
STONES	48
LITTLE HEART	49
IN DEATH'S CHAMBER	50
CHANGED	52
THE SCULPTOR	54
ONE WANING MOON	55
THE SOWER	56
METEMPSYCHOSIS	57
TRAILING ARBUTUS	58
A QUESTION FOR POETS	59
I	60
THE FLIGHT	61
A COMMON FLOWER	62
SECRETS	63
AFTER READING ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	64
YEARS, HURRY BY!	65
THE LOCOMOTIVE	66
THE MONTH OF MAGIC	67
THE LOST NOTE	68
WISDOM	70

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE QUESTION	72
THE REAL AMERICA	73
ANCHORAGE	74
THE WINGS	75
ON A FLY-LEAF OF BURNS'S SONGS	77
A DITTY FOR MAY	78
THE QUEST	79
WORLDSONG	81
A TOAST TO RUDYARD KIPLING	82
ONE OLD VETERAN	84
PROLOGUE TO A BOOK OF COLLEGE VERSE	85
LIFE THE MYSTERY	86
IN THE PAUSES OF THE RAIN	87
GRAPES	89
A FUNERAL	90
A SONG FOR SIMPLICITY	91
A WISH	92
YESTERDAY	93
A HUMBLE WISH	94
ROYALTY	95
A MARCH MOOD	96
LOST KNOWLEDGE	97
TO A YOUNG POET	98

STEPS TOWARD FAITH.

THE COMEDY	101
A MOOD OF RESTLESS SPRING	103
THESE OUR LIVES	104
IN THE FEASTING HALL	105
EARTH-MOTHER	106
MYSTERIES	107

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
FEAR	109
REMEDY	110
SOMEWHILE	111
MIRACLES	112
VALUES	113
WHAT THEN?	114
A PRAYER OF ONE OF GOD'S CHILDREN	115
IF ONLY	116
OCEAN AND BAY	117
"OPEN UNTO THEIR CRY"	119
THE WAY HOME	120
PARDON'S CROWN	121
A THANKSGIVING	122
ABOVE EVERY NAME	123
JOY'S PILGRIM	124
CHRIST THE RISEN	125

NATURE AND LIFE

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.



Nature: The Artist.

SUCH hints as untaught Nature yields!
The calm disorder of the sea,
The straggling splendour of the fields,
The wind's gay incivility.

O workman with your conscious plan,
Compass and square are little worth;
Copy (nay, only poets can)
The artless masonry of earth.

Go watch the windy spring's carouse,
And mark the winter wonders grow,—
The graceful gracelessness of boughs,
The careless carpentry of snow!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Masques.

HOW worse than grief is grief's disguise! a tear
May calm the heart, the fevered pulses cool, ---
But sadder than the moans of loveless Lear,
The mock-mirth laughter of his faithful Fool!

Blest tears! for some have wept themselves to sleep;
But life's loud gaiety — what tales it tells!
Only the children laugh (the angels weep)
When dry-eyed Sorrow grasps the cap and bells!

A PASTURE.

Ⓔ Pasture.

ROUGH pasture where the blackberries
grow! —

It bears upon its churlish face
No sign of beauty, art or grace;
Not here the silvery coverts glow
That April and the angler know.

There sleeps no brooklet in this wild,
Smooth-resting on its mosses sleek,
Like loving lips upon a cheek
Soft as the face of maid or child —
Just boulders, helter-skelter piled.

Ungenerous nature but endows
These acres with the stumps and stocks
Which should be trees, with rude, gray
rocks;
Over these humps and hollows browse,
Daily, the awkward, shambling cows.

Here on the right, a straggling wall
Of crazy, granite stones, and there
A rotten pine-trunk, brown and bare,

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

A mass of huge brakes, rank and tall —
The burning blue sky over all.

And yet these blackberries! shy and chaste!
The noisy markets know no such —
So ripe they tumble when you touch;
Long, taper — rarer wines they waste
Than ever town-bred toppers taste.

And tell me! have you looked o'erhead
From lawns where lazy hammocks swing
And seen such orioles on the wing?
Such flames of song that flashed and fled?
Well, maybe — I'm not city-bred.

TO THE AMERICAN POET.

To the American Poet.

UNRAVEL all your tangled cheats,
Your triple-twisted thread conceits, —
Your subtle sonnets fling afar! —
Stand up and show what man you are!

Why linger o'er decrepit shrine
In Hellas or in Palestine?
America as Greece is grand,
America is Holy Land.

The songs of Nile and Jordan's tunes
Our sluggish Mississippi croons, —
Lo! caught in Erie like a gem
The star that shone o'er Bethlehem!

The age — young, buoyant — longs to hear
Its hopes in music high and clear,
Yet ashes o'er your laurels lie,
You rend your garment of the sky.

O juggler with the fire divine,
O hoarder of God's bread and wine,
Your dark and doleful sprigs of verse
Nod like the plumes above a hearse.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Behold your birthright! Cast away
The mess of pottage. Scorn for aye
The smirking *bravo*, thin applause, —
Small praise of critics' courts and laws.

Join the great chorus — all that sings!
Seize the vast harp of divers strings!
What hands have help'd that growing tone: —
Job's, Homer's, Shakespeare's! Add your own!

We want again the note of joy,
The immortal rapture of the boy,
The flame lit quenchless in the dust,
The lips that sing because they must.

A world of wonders waits its song, —
Invention, science, hideous wrong
Heart-smitten by Truth's arrow sharp, —
Up, blinded skeptic! Grasp your harp!

WITH A COPY OF KEATS.

With a Copy of Keats.

LIKE listless lullabies of twilight seas
Heard from still coves, and soft and sad as
these; —

Such is the echo of his perfect song, —
It lives, it lingers long!

Beside his fame Hyperion's lustre pales,
Sweeter his own song than his nightingale's;
No voice speaks, in the century that has fled,
So deathless from the dead!

How many stately epics have been tossed
Rudely against Time's shore and wreck'd and lost,
While Keats, the dreaming boy, floats down Time's
sea
His lyric argosy!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

An April Mood.

*O TOUCH and fly of April moods !
O eloquence of voiceless woods !
O alphabet of bird and bee !
O solitude that talk'd with me !*

Lips, ears — I prest them to the grass,
I heard the inner secrets pass,
Yes, heard the plotting sap which flows
Like laughing flame in all that grows.

Conspiracy of fire and force,
Till the Perhaps becomes Of Course,
Till hidden juices upward flow,
And dreams have grown the What We Know!

O warm, bare, nourishing Mother Earth,
Throbbing with veins of health and mirth,
Life is thy promise, life thy plan —
Thou breast that sucklest grass and man!

*O touch and fly of tameless moods !
O immaterial, priceless goods !
O sweet carousal of the springs
That flow through all the Primal Things !*

TILDY IN THE CHOIR.

Tildy in the Choir.

NOTES that jingle, bars that trip,
Songs of dance-hall workmanship -
Leaping with a wanton ease
From high C to where you please,
Loud, irreverent, and gay —
Suit the worship of to-day;
But that tune of long ago —
Stately, solemn, somewhat slow
(Dear "Old Hundred" — that's the air) —
Will outrank them anywhere;
Once it breathed a seraph's fire
(Tildy sang it in the choir).

How she stood up straight and tall!
Ah! again I see it all:
Cheeks that glowed and eyes that laughed,
Teeth like cream, and lips that quaffed
All the genial country's wealth
Of large cheer and perfect health,
Gown — well, yes — old-fashioned quite,
You would call it "just a fright,"
But I love that quaint attire
(Tildy wore it in the choir).

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

How we sang — for *I* was there,
Occupied a singer's chair
Next to — well, no prouder man
Ever lifts the bass nor can,
Sometimes held the self-same book;
(How my nervous fingers shook!)
Sometimes — wretch! — while still the air
Echoed to the parson's prayer,
I would whisper in her ear
What she could not help but hear.
Once I told her my desire
(Tildy promised in the choir).

Well, those days are past, and now
Come gray hairs, and yet somehow
I can't think those years have fled —
Still those roadways know my tread,
Still I climb that old pine stair,
Sit upon the stiff-backed chair,
Stealing glances toward my left
Till her eyes repay the theft;
Death's a dream and Time's a liar —
Tildy still is in the choir.

Come, Matilda number two,
Fin de siècle maiden you!

TILDY IN THE CHOIR.

Wonder if you'd like to see
Her I loved in fifty-three?
Yes? all right, then go and find
Mother's picture — "Papa!" — Mind!
She and I were married. You
Were our youngest. Now you too
Raise the same old anthem till
All the church is hushed and still
With a single soul to hear.
Do I flatter? Ah, my dear,
Time has brought my last desire —
Tildy still *is* in the choir!

Castles in Spain.

DEAR boyhood's conjuries! Dreamlit shores and
plains,
Our castles and our Spains ;
Where suns had never ris'n, moons never set—
Stranger than sleep: dome, fretwork, minaret,
Pale, ghostly parapet.

And thro' the marble mist of tower and spire
More fragile than desire,
Our hearts went up as restless as wild birds
And traced the lines of sculptured trees and herds,
And spell'd the artist's words.

Nor were we wonderers wholly desolate
Midst the gray splendours set ;
For vineyards grew thereby ; and half-divine
Flush'd flowerlike faces, rosy-stained with wine,
Press'd lips with thine and mine.

We slept ; how far from all Fear's false alarms
Clasp'd in those white, soft arms ;
We woke ; what breath of warm words fanned our
face,

CASTLES IN SPAIN.

Blither than songs the skylark sheds thro' space
From some rapt, far-off place.

We quaff'd a liquor the strange name whereof
(The Voices sang) was Love ;
Who drain'd that beaker madness fill'd his veins,
Delirious fires and slow seductive pains —
What vintages like Spain's !

But now ! but now ! — O castles, where are ye ?
Sunk in what dream-strewn sea !
Idle to ask, How did the wonders go ? —
We know not even how they came, we know
Only 'twas long ago !

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY

The Rainbow Bag.

WHEN I was seven or thereabouts the rainbow
filled my fancy,
I dropt my toys and only loved that span of
necromancy;
A strayaway, a strayaway, I chased the fleeting
wonder;
And sought beneath the spangled arch the bag of
fairy plunder;
“Ha, ha! chee, chee!” the robins laughed, “Oh
see that youngster silly,
He thinks he'll find a pouch of gold, but will he, will
he, will he?”
I scorned the gold of buttercups with raindrops in
their chalice,
Such common wealth could ne'er suffice to line my
fancy's palace;
“Oh whereaway? oh whereaway?” the saucy leaves
kept singing,
“Oh whither now, you dreamy boy?” the boughs
were softly ringing;
But oh, the cat-bird plagued me worst: “You funny
little man you,
You think you'll rob the rainbow bag, but can you,
can you, can you?”

THE RAINBOW BAG.

Oh dear, oh dear! that fair, fresh year, when I was
prince and poet
And happiest lad alive, altho' I lacked the sense to
know it!
From far away, from far away, where Memory keeps
her voices,
I hear the taunt, "You boy grown tall, you've only
changed your choices,
You've named your rainbow something else, you
chase it still for ever,
But you will find the bag of gold — oh never, never,
never!"

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

One October.

WHEN the sodden roads were sober,
And the North Wind's gusty breath
Drove the leaves, that late October,
Downward in a dance of death,
How we left the huddled village,
With its maple-shaded street —
Red in spite of autumn's pillage —
Till the pastures kissed our feet,
Upland acres, wild and sweet.

Wither'd leaves — how dry they crackled
When you swept them with your gown,
Till your willing steps were shackled
In a rustling net of brown ;
Milkweed drift, as light as eider,
Snowing round you, care-free girl,
With your cheeks as brown as cider,
And, by rude breeze toss'd aswirl, —
Lovelier locks than art can curl.

How we set that partridge drumming !
Till the silence of the wood
Listened, woke to meet our coming,
And the gray trees understood :

ONE OCTOBER.

And we learned the simple fashion
That all country things can teach,
While a subtler tie than passion
Seemed to bind us each to each,
Deeper far than books or speech.

I was just a dilettante
Dapper college Junior then,
Quoting sagely Browning, Dante,
Dobson, and the lesser men.
And I thought *myself* a poet —
Fancy that for once was true,
Tho', dear, if you did but know it,
All that made me that was — Who?
Oh, you modest mocker, you!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Seasons.

DECEMBER filters o'er the fields
From softly-sifting clouds,
She buries Summer tenderly
In white immaculate shrouds ;
But through the pale parade of death
Two bosoms keep their June,
Beat with the pulse of music's birth
And tremble into tune.
Then hush ! O happy heart !
O heart, we love her so !
The roses blossom in our thoughts
Tho' all the roads be snow.

June comes once more and leads with her
Her punctual troop along, —
Her lilies and her lavender,
Her satire and her song ;
Her hateful swallows sweep the blue
And taunt the souls that sigh,
For every bough she brings a flower,
A wing for every sky.
Then heal, O hapless heart !
O heart, we loved her so !
The roses clamber up our walls
But all within is snow.

THE MODERN RUTH.

The Modern Ruth.

(TO CLARA BARTON.)

DEATH, the red Harvester, with his hireling
bands,
Leaves the stray reapings for her patient hands;
May his scythe rust, ere he, enamoured grown,
Shall claim this gentle gleaner as his own!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Wanted: A Book of Travels!

O H, who shall write the voyages down
Where dragon-flies set sail and drown?
Who knows the rigging of the craft
Where fare the fat moths, drunk and daft?
Oh, come, historian of the sky!
Name us the navies of the fly,
And trace the pathways up the blue
Which Shelley and the skylark knew;
Show us the canvas, gossamer-thin,
Which wafts the dream-boat, Might Have Been,—
Fathom the leagues of ether-sea,
And write the Odyssey of a bee!

TO A POET WHO LIVES IN THE PAST.

To a Poet Who Lives in the Past.

O ECHO-GATHERER, why, with servile breath,
Suck the lost music from the lips of Death,
Then, with the great sounds too familiar grown,
Re-voice dead harmonies as they were thine
own!—

Why rob the Masters? May we not to-day
See all they sang of? Has love waned away?
Has hope? Has faith? Have flowers forgot to
spring?

Has the sky faded from the bluebird's wing?
Grow eagles lame? Do larks sing out of tune?
Doth not fierce Summer drain the cup of noon
Brim'd with the Sun's blood? Is June robbed of
wealth?

Hath veil'd, clandestine Twilight lost her stealth?
Still leaps the Rainbow with her blush of fire—
Daughter of Wonder, sister of Desire!—
Still sinks the Sun behind the western slope;
Still sail the fleets of commerce, and of hope;
Still Mississippi holds her continent-sway;
Still Californian winters mimic May;
Still, proud as Athens, stand the factory-fed
New England towns where toil and learning wed;

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Still, while the metre-mongers haunt the shades,
Fame crowns the Golden Gate and Palisades;
Still, though the Past has perished, stands the
 Now, —
If thou disdainest her, no poet thou !

LITTLE REBECCA.

Little Rebecca.

HERE is the sampler ; faint and pale
The crewels that were brilliant then,
But still we read the simple tale :
“ Wrought bye Rebecca agèd ten.”

Beneath a crown of nature's gold
I catch a glimpse of artless grace,
The years draw back and I behold
A small, sweet, pensive, flower-like face.

I wonder what she dreamt about
The while she stitched with patient care,
As through the window-pane without,
The sun slept on the village square.

I keep them now — the wool she spun,
Her slippers and the bonnet small,
Her copy-book, left half undone,
The funny harpsichord and all.

And this is something that the folk
Of godly heart had thought a sin.
Ah ! did it seem a fairy's stroke
When she caressed you, violin ?

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Well, here's the end. But if you care,
We'll wander to the quaint old lot,
So small and overgrown and square,
Where friends receive, but know us not.

Beneath the mosses hides the date
Of seventeen-fifty — yes, 'twas then;
Just read upon the fallen slate:
“ Here lyes Rebeccah, agèd ten.”

COLUMBIA.

Columbia.

MATED to the Millenium, — Time's last heir
And proudest daughter, conquerless as he ;
Girdled with lakes like jewels princely fair,
With strong feet planted in the Mexic sea !

Leave dotard empires flames of drunken war,
Be thine chaste hours of labour and increase,
Vineyards and harvests yielding guiltless store,
Toil's bloodless battles on the plains of peace !

Yet when slain Weakness, dying at thy door,
Summoning thy right arm's vengeance, clasps thy
feet, —
Thy sword that drinks her murderer's blood is pure
As laughing sickles in the saffron wheat.

Clearing a crimson path where Peace may tread
More safely, thou dost play thy patient part,
Love's pledged ally — yea, though thy blade be
red —
Thrusting War's weapons thro' his own false
heart.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

O goddess, arctic-crowned and tropic-shod
And belted with great waters, hear our cry —
More honest never reached the ear of God :
We'll serve thee, laud thee, love thee, till we die !

TO THE MADONNA.

To the Madonna.

(IN BOTTICELLI'S CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN.)

H EEDLESS of comforts, innocent of cares,
Thy sweet lips moulded by unnumbered
prayers

To their pure perfectness; thy calm smile caught
From peasant's ministries and angel's thought; —
Handmaiden of Heav'n's purpose! — with thine
eyes

(Unlearned in worldly lore — in love so wise)

Dropped wearily, too heavy with their joy,
And resting gently on the guileless Boy, —
Mother of Galilee, thy soft arms hold

A fairer burden than this band of gold
Wherewith the world's heart crowns thee; doubly
blest

Whose meek brow wears love's chaplet, and whose
breast

Holds, on its virginal beauty undefiled,
The crown of all these years, love's self, — the
Child!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Trees in Winter.

BENEATH heaven's gaze they stand — these
naked trees,
And, unabashed, lift brawny arms on high
In supplication; flouted by each breeze,
The jest and mockery of the earth and sky.

How fair till winter, their Delilah, came,
And on her false white breast in sleep they lay;
Shorn of their beauty now — behold their shame!
Despoiled and desolate on a songless day!

GRIEF AND JOY.

*

Grief and Joy.

IT takes two for a kiss,
Only one for a sigh;
Two by two we marry,
One by one we die.

Joy is a partnership,
Grief weeps alone;
Many guests had Cana,
Gethsemane had one.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Love's Nest.

LOVE wove a nest in my heart, —
Woe's me, that April day!
And when the summer shorten'd,
She led her brood away.

Those downy singers stirr'd
Such chorus in my breast!
And here I'm left with Memory,
And here's the empty nest!

THE MOON AND THE GIRL.

The Moon and the Girl.

THE moon sagged heavily, as if care
Clung round it; shrivelled and lean and
bare, —

Its face was yellow as her hair.

She stole across the sleeping town;
Her white cheeks had lost all their brown;
The heavy night-dews drench'd her gown.

She sent one glance up where it strayed
Shrunken to thinness of a blade
Almost, yet golden as her braid.

Only a young thing — girl as yet,
Though somewhere Grief and she had met. —
(Oh, would that sick moon never set?)

She brushed away her glittering hair
And, having made her bosom bare,
Kissed the white child that slumbered there.

Mayhap this made the moon recall
That Bethlehem group in Joseph's stall
Where it had taught the Star to fall.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Mayhap Herself, the Virgin good,
Leaned over, loved and understood,
Forgave, for joy of motherhood.

Howe'er that be, the young girl soon
Rose quietly (Night had passed its noon),
Across her calm face streamed the moon.

THE BOATMAN : SLEEP.

The Boatman : Sleep.

I AM the crony of the Dark,
The bosom friend of Death ;
My craft is lighter than a lark,
And silenter than breath.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

When the Great Poet Comes.

WHEN the wrestlings of the Race
Shall have grown to an embrace,
And o'er fields that blood has drenched
Hands are clasped that once were clenched, —

When the gay laugh of the rich
Learns from poverty its pitch,
Till the music of that mood
Strikes the high note — brotherhood, —

When no tangling twist of creeds
Cobwebs all our living needs,
And we learn the worth that springs
From the truth of simple things, —

When the tunesters of our time
Learn to live before they rhyme,
Burn their sonnets to a star,
Love the brown earth where they are, —

Blush for all their small pretence —
Soul built 'round with stake and fence,
Pose of knowing more than they —
Artless folk — who toil and pray; —

WHEN THE GREAT POET COMES.

Then, upon the heights of dawn,
With God's beauty clothed upon,
Arm as firm as limbs of Thor,
Lips to Music's heart the door,

Heeding neither laugh nor frown,
Shrill disfavour of the Town,
Jestings in the market-place,
Hatred's fist or Flattery's face,

He shall stand — with brow of flame,
As the Hebrew prophets came,
Shouting, as he smites the string,
“ In Jehovah's name I sing ! ”

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

& Patriot's Hymn.

GOD of our sires as of their sons,
 Forgive the frenzied lips that pour
 From foolish hearts unceasing store
Of menace — threats of forts and guns
 And horrid, home-devouring war.
Father of all the souls that be,
Our only source of succour; Thee
We laud and praise exceedingly!

Ours is the land where fields once red
 With brothers' blood are blue with flowers,
 No jealous states, no rival powers,
No treason hid in smiles; our Head
 And only King art Thou! Thine hours
Are Liberty's and Love's; and Thee,
Who settest slaves and peoples free,
We praise and laud unceasingly.

Americans! we bless the name!
 The Britons of transplanted breed,
 The fruit of late and lasting seed,
The Saxons of a fadeless fame! —
 Our watchword Toil, and Peace our creed.

A PATRIOT'S HYMN.

Earth's swords shall rust, but born of Thee
Are Truth and Love and Peace — these three,
Children of Thine eternity!

Once alien, now united, sons
Of that staunch Isle that lords the sea,
Our joint-heirs to the Future, ye
Who smile behind your smokeless guns,
Though lion-brood if broils must be, —
Join the New Prayer — our pledge and plea!
Blood-brothers, vow that Earth shall see
Peace, through the swordless years to be!

Dead is the Despot — dead his cause.
This our new danger: Being great;
This: Boughten chair and candidate,
And Senates plotting peaceless laws
With all the pomp and stealth of State.
Our Founder's God, we turn to Thee
Who only makest wise and free,
Dwelling in Peace immortally.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

The Galleon.

THE galleon, freighter and fighter too,
Sank, sank ;
Fat in the hips, and stout of shank, —
The lurching Spaniard stove and sank
With the Flanders coast in view.

The galleon, lost with her lusty crew,
Sank, sank ;
The staggering sailors never shrank,
And the liquor the drunken sea-dogs drank
Was salter than landsmen brew.

The galleon, scuttled by God knows who,
Sank, sank ;
The captain cursed, but his face was blank,
And the old cook, lash'd to a floating plank,
Starved with the shore in view.

The galleon (Mary, pity her crew !)
Sank, sank ;
And the burghers crowded the old sea-bank,
And smoked, and swore Dutch oaths, and drank,
And the waves and the sky were blue !

THE VISION.

The Vision.

LO, in a dream methought I was borne up
By strong invisible arms to some black height
Space-poised in immemorial vacancies
Illimitably dayless, whence our globe
Shone like a sun-swung plaything thro' the night,
And the crazed universe of blindfold stars
Chased furious, self-provoked, uncharioteered,
Goalless, and lost in chaos. As I stood,
Shivering in that dusk ether, thus the Voice:
"O woman-born, look downward, till thine eye
Hath taught thy soul to scorn those insect-wings, —
That fire-fly flock, which, self-consumed with haste,
Winnows with ignorant pinions the cold air,
Racing nowhither." Lo! again I looked.
The million bubbles blown by lips of Death
Whirled witless through the void. And very far
Down the abysm, tow'rd the uttermost verge
Of Night's dark boundary, sped with restless wings,
Chance-driven, that fretful wanderer, our earth!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Roses.

THE red rose spoke : " I lay against
Her lips ; she pressed me there,
With warmer blushes than mine own,
Then twined me in her hair."

The white rose spoke : " I drooped against
Her breast ; they laid me there ;
'Twas whiter than mine own, meseemed,
And oh, so cold and fair !"

GOLDIE.

Goldie.

THE old man sits on the cottage porch,
The children hang on the gate ;
Your playmates call you, Goldie,
Oh, why must you make them wait !

Her playthings lie where she laid them,
The doll and the basket red,
The butterfly-net stands ready,
And here is the little sled.

I can see her flower-filled apron,
I can hear her footsteps fall,
And still my heart cries, " Goldie !"
But she never answers the call.

Hers was the heart of summer,
Hers was the face of spring,
And hers the voice of the bird that lights
On the highest bough to sing.

The orchards are gay as ever
With the old-time colour and scent,
But something has robbed the autumn
Of its measureless content ;

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

For the butterfly-net stands ready,
And here is the basket red,
And the breeze calls, "Goldie! Goldie!" —
But little Goldie is dead.

A BIRTH SONG.

A Birth Song.

I LOVE these earliest weeks of spring, —
The blight, the promise, and the sting,
The hint of baffling wings that sweep
From out the Arctic caves of sleep.

As in the breast of maid or boy
Come Love's first throbs of painful joy,
So here beneath this yellow grass
Life's muffled preparations pass.

O'er fields where drunken brooklets brawl
Sifts pollen, shy and seminal ;
A subtle passion haunts the air
As warm as youth, as pure as prayer.

The million lips that lightly fall
On dewy faces virginal —
Hush ! Do you catch it, maid and boy ? —
The laughter of their startled joy ?

Soon come the days of song and nest,
Of thirsting lips and loving breast,
Of tongues that lullaby the tune
Which cradles all the babes of June,
When joys that in life's juices be
Taste sweet as immortality.

Love's Prayer.

LOVE, like Religion, has its prayer :
“ Give me this day my daily bread,” —
Poor Love, that has so much to bear,
 So seldom is its hunger fed.
It asks for loaves : instead there come
In answer, only crust and crumb,
And often, as it pleads alone,
It gains no other bread than stone.

And still it breathes this simple want,
 Alas, it knows no other prayer, —
Nor ease can lure, nor failure daunt,
 Nor terrors drive it from its care ;
Deceived so oft, wouldst thou not guess
’Twould faint for very weariness ?
Nay, it will plead till prayer be dead,
“ Give me this day my daily bread ! ”

THAT FUTURE DAY.

That Future Day.

WHEN this warm body shall be dust
Some dateless year from now,
Still shall the reaper bind his sheaf,
Still shall the ploughman plow.

On other ears than mine shall fall
The veery's double trill,
Another's feet the sunset-trail
Shall lure from hill to hill.

Though all forgotten then be I,
A moss-grown thing my name,
Though every chronicler forget
These hostages to Fame,

Yet if above my flatten'd mound
Where wildflowers greet the rain,
My children's children's children's child
Shall twist a daisy-chain ;

Though he have never heard of me
Who shouts and leaps in play
And in the marble's shadow laughs
The summer noon away,

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

In my white robe, Eternity,
I shall look down, perchance,
And my immortal years may be
More blissful for the glance.

TO AMERICA.

To America.

OFTTIMES, Democracy, thou seem'st to me
Not what the poets paint—a virgin fair,
With soft limbs, and pale cheeks of purity
Framed in the splendid noonday of her hair;

Nay, but some Western Titan, bare of breast,
Huge-legged, low-browed, and bearded as of old,
A man of mountain muscle, and a chest
Whose lungs indifferent drink the heat, the cold.

Thy laugh shakes empires to their fall; thy curse
Makes buried tyrannies tremble in their graves,—
The Erie cataract has no thunders worse,
Nor hoarse-mouth'd Hatteras harvesting her waves.

Yet, coarse, colossal, — thou art tender too;
Though crouching nations hasten at thy beck
To pay thee homage, weakness finds thee true,
The face of childhood nestles on thy neck.

O pioneer of all the years to be,
Bearing the axe that fells the trees of Time,
Thy monstrous beauty meaneth more to me
Than all the goddesses of youth and rhyme.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Stones.

IT was a costly stone
That gleamed above her head,
Within her raven hair
Its cold, white fire was shed ;
But that was long ago —
Youth loves its diamonds so !

It is a humble stone
That stands above her head,
We push the moss aside —
And the old tale is read :
Can Youth endure ? Ah, no !
Life hath not willed it so.

LITTLE HEART.

Little Heart.

LITTLE heart, lightfoot heart,
Fleet as flakes of snow,
Dancing down the Hill-o'-Dreams
In the Long Ago !

Little heart, lagfoot heart,
Limping sad and slow,
Climbing up the Hill-o'-Dreams
From the Long Ago !

Paths grow long and hills grow high,
Summits lose their glow ;
But we'll still take Memory's lane
Back to Long Ago !

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

In Death's Chamber.

THE chamber of Death is narrow and low,
And all of marble the floor, —
So still, you can hear the grasses grow
Over the rusting door.

And the oozy walls are dark and dumb
As ye may not tell with pen,
And the doting dreamers who hither come
They fare not forth again.

When Man strode into the chamber of Death
(The lover come to his bride),
“Thy touch is cold and sweet,” he saith,
“And I would sleep at thy side.

“I am tired with spending of fruitless breath,
Of the sowing that ne'er shall reap,
I am sick of the noise of words,” he saith,
“And now I have come to sleep.”

The lips of Man were warm and red,
But Death's were thin and white,
And every tress that swept her head
Was dark as the black midnight.

IN DEATH'S CHAMBER.

He folded her in a fool's embrace —
The power of his love was strong —
And he whispered close to her passive face,
“ I have loved thee long and long.”

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Changed.

SUCH vulgar, naked leagues of grass!
Such huge, gnarled, brawny arms of oaks,
Their muscles bared for brutal strokes,
Upraised in menace as we pass,
With hardly leaves for cloaks!

Why was it that these hateful rocks,
These pastures with their wealth of weed,
Once lent to love her fondest creed —
Taught youth's divinest paradox: —
“ Joy flowers from every seed ;

“ Each homeliest bloom that parts the sod
Is promise-petal'd ; Heav'n with men
Meets in the violet or the wren,
And worm, wing, leaf are all from God ” —
And we believed it — then.

But these false bushes — this black clump
Of poisonous boughs — this jeering breeze —
This coarse and pagan chant of trees —
That snake-haunt 'neath the rotting stump —
What message lurks in these ?

CHANGED.

In freckled fog-banks deep as death
A flatten'd, sallow sun a-squat,
A hush of winds that crouch and plot,
A starv'd sobriety of breath,
A shape — we know not what.

O dark conspiracy of trees —
Where 'neath a scornful stare of sky,
A wingless worm that craves to fly
Undreams his dream by swift degrees,
And crawls in earth to die!

Once how the soft winds swayed above!
The boughs were wild with song and May;
And now again we walk this way
And know the wonders fled — ah, love,
'Tis we have changed, not they.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

The Sculptor.

THOUGHT is a sculptor. Lo! his hand
Graves lasting grooves on round, soft face,
With lines of cunning and command,
Of lust, of laughter, grief, or grace.

He from the marble of the flesh
Evokes the angel of the Man;
"Can'st make this foul block fair and fresh?" —
We plead; he proudly cries, "I can."

Yet of that waiting marble know
O soul, the sculptor, bidden by thee,
Can shape a thing of shame and woe
Whereat Hell laughs, — "'Twas carved for me."

It is the chisel of thy will
Wherewith his fadeless art is wrought,
Consummate, deathless is his skill —
O soul, beware the sculptor, Thought.

‡

ONE WANING MOON.

One Waning Moon.

LIKE a withered petal blown on high
From a shattered rose of June,
Across a gusty, cloud-sown sky
Drifted the shrunken moon.

It fell on waves that shriek'd for prey,
It lit the wings of a gull,
It shone on a rusting anchor that lay
On the deck of a drifting hull.

It glimmered on drunken alleys and lanes
Where the ruin'd curse and weep ;
It streamed through little farm-house panes
On lips that smiled in sleep.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

The Sower.

A SOWER went forth to sow,
And the stars were his seed!
O'er Night's black plain he straw'd the grain,
Till the night was white indeed.

He had harness'd the sun to his plough,
He had furrow'd the murk and mist,
And the fallow plain suck'd in the grain
As it fell from his swinging fist.

And he laugh'd for the joy in his heart,
And named the stars in his mirth,--
Venus and Pleiades,
Mercury, Mars, and Earth.

And he gave to each a gift
As he scatter'd the shining grain,—
To Mars the gift of power,
To Earth the gift of pain.

And he sang to each several seed
As they flew to their place,
"Be fruitful and flower in God's good hour,
And blossom before His face!"

METEMPSYCHOSIS.

Metempsychosis.

A FIRELIGHT fay, thou dancest on the wall
When genial backlogs purr, when soft young
lips,
Guided by thee, seek for the lips they love,
When young heart yearns and leans to comrade
heart,
Nor, foolish, dreams thee hypocrite, but friend —
Accomplice calls thee, not conspirator ;

To think that thou, O spirit of Light, canst turn
The elf malign that grins on reeking lanes
Where drunkards brawl by broken tallow lights,
Where children cry before the angry dawn,
As, cold and gray, the mocking daybreak leans
Over the beer-splash'd window-sill and laughs !

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Trailing Arbutus.

WHAT insect-lover keeps with thee his tryst?
Whence comes this fair confusion, dearest
flower? —

Sweet, pouting, pink lips, waiting to be kiss'd,
Shy, blushing cheeks, half buried in thy bower?
Give me the secret that disturbs thy breast!
Why not — thou nursling of the April shower?

Was it a breeze? Or did some faint reply
Rise like the voice of dreamers, drows'd and
hush'd?

“I woke beneath the warm Arcadian sky
Where naiads laugh'd and founts perennial gush'd;
Eros and Psyche one fair day stroll'd by,
When Cupid, spying, kiss'd me — and I blush'd.”

A QUESTION FOR POETS.

Q Question for Poets.

WHOSO would sing a noonlight song
 (Up, and far away!)
Must climb the yellow ladder
 And stare in the Eye-o'-Day.

Whoso would sing a moonlight song
 (Up, and far away!)
Must warm himself at the outmost star,
 Wrapp'd in a shadow gray.

Poet, reading the finger-posts,
 Now which road will ye go?—
The noonlight road with Kipling,
 The moonlight road with Poe?

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

3.

I LAY at choice my limbs, my senses by :
“ Camp there, and bivouac ! for I wander hence.”
Thus bidding, fareth from their circle forth
My conscious Self, Imagination's mate,
The sleepless, never-resting thing named *I*.

THE FLIGHT.

The Flight.

LO, how they soar and sweep heaven's azure springs,
Shaking the sultry shadows from their wings,
On thro' forbidden sunsets find their way,
Following with fond faith the undying day;
Outsinging even the silver-shod swift Moon
With the weird treble of a starry tune, —
A flock of deathless birds they pierce the blue; --
They are my hopes — would I might follow too!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

A Common Flower.

THIS frail gold chalice held a dewdrop up,
That I am sure of, for it shone, a star;
Now it is faded — poor press'd buttercup!
Flowers, how like youth you are!

Ah, stay, dear vision! still she plucks it, while
Her face — the fairest flower, from brow to chin —
Those deep June grasses, jealous of her smile,
Framed covetously in.

Yes, once it knew love's joy and love's eclipse,
And lay one moment where 'twere heaven to bide,
It lived a wondrous instant on her lips,
And on her heart it died.

SECRETS.

Secrets.

O ROSE, climb up to her window
And in through the casement reach,
And say what I may not utter,
In your beautiful silent speech !

She will shake the dew from your petals,
She will press you close to her lips,
She will hold you never so lightly
In her warm white finger-tips.

And then — who can tell ? — she may whisper
(While the city sleeps below),
“ I was dreaming of him when you woke me,
But, rose, he must never know.”

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

After Reading Antony and Cleopatra.

MY spirit haunts those torpid sun-tann'd coasts,
Abodes of languorous ease, where never come
The strifes of strenuous Saxon conflicts, dumb
With years on years of drowse. The sleeping ghosts
Of immemorial beauties, once the toasts
Of king-served feasts, still keep a dreaming hum
Of gossip centuries old; and hark! — the drum,
The clang, the martial valiance of the hosts!

And o'er them all — these faces craftful, bold,
With lust-red lips, eyes hot as Egypt's zone,
A shrill, gay laugh, lithe grace, soul-dazzling smile,
And Cleopatra blinds us, as of old
She lit great Antony to his fall, and shone
A baleful brightness in the land of Nile.

YEARS, HURRY BY!

Years, Hurry By!

CALENDARS, I count you vain, —
Bastards of some Arab's brain!
You life's measure? Fie!
Toys of custom and of kings!
Do I grieve that Time has wings?
Nay! my spirit laughs and sings,
“Years, hurry by!”

Life, you've bless'd me; you have brought
Gifts of home, friends, quiet thought,
And a stormless sky.
As you're hastening tow'rd the goal
I'll not bribe you nor cajole,
Nay! I shout with care-free soul:
“Years, hurry by!”

“Oh, for childhood's village street
Printed o'er with small bare feet,
Stretching to the sky!”
Nay, the rather wish for this:
Roads the feet of labour kiss,
Leading to the longer bliss!
Years, hurry by!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

The Locomotive.

WHAT! has the age Heroic come once more,
And but returned sublimer? They are fled —
The race of Homer, — round the Ionian shore
The blue Ægean breakers dirge the dead;
Yet what is this! an epic carved in steel
And winged for flight; a piece of Vulcan's art;
A Hercules of cylinder and wheel, —
And, breathed into the brawny bulk — a heart;
While back of the blind impulse is Command
To guide the mighty motions of the soul;
The keen brown fingers of a human hand
Have laid upon those stalwart loins control,
And when Will whispers "Go!" the echoing plain
Rings its response to Passion matched with Brain!

THE MONTH OF MAGIC.

The Month of Magic.

WHEN the bee, that idle skipper,
Steers his shallop down the breeze,
Launching from the lady's-slipper,
Anchoring in the lilac trees, —
When the marsh-bird's ditty amorous
(Where the Indian-turnip grows)
Mingles with the pæan clamorous
From the black heart of the crows, —
When the breath of roses lingers
Like an incense in the sky, —
When the odour of syringas
Tempt the vagrant butterfly, —
When the moth, a knavish fellow,
Steals the coins of gold that shine
In the cowslip's purse of yellow,
Sacks and robs the lily's shrine, —
When the ether throbs with question —
Intimation — whispered prayer —
Orioles, full of sly suggestion,
Drop a hint down through the air, —
Then by some strange necromancy
Sad old Earth is set to tune ;
Would you know the cause? / I fancy
Heaven is keeping tryst with June !

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

The Lost Note.

WINNOWNED by the wings of swallows
Gleams the soft sky childhood knew;
Spring returns and summer follows,
And the winter whitens too;
Ploughs forsake no April furrows,
Still the sunset wraps the hill;—
Oh, the heart of earth is singing,
Singing still!

Look! the roses clasp and clamber!—
Once they climbed our mother's porch;
Sunrise has the same clear amber,
Noonday holds no colder torch.
Love alone can waste its rapture,
Youth's first passion lose its thrill,
Though the heart of earth is singing,
Singing still.

Care the glad bees what comes after
If the lilacs only blow?
Hush! these brooks are wild with laughter
At their jest of long ago!

THE LOST NOTE.

Could we but relearn this music! —
And with boyhood's artless skill
Keep our heart with earth's still singing,
Singing still!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Wisdom.

SHE came, fair Wisdom, knocking loud
At every ledge that lines the way. —
Her brow was high, her step was proud, —
Her glance more beautiful than day.

She smote the rock, and straight uprose
Stark monsters from the vanish'd years.
There gleam'd great floods, strange boreal glows,
And meteors flashed among the spheres.

But what a marvel there should pass
A careless crowd who took no heed!
A man of science, with his glass,
Gazed only on a roadside weed.

One in a cassock wander'd by
And stroked his sleekly shaven chin: —
"How wonderful these worlds on high,
Beyond thy thought, O man of sin!"

One said: "How slow our sense to greet
Is Wisdom with her secret law,
Albeit she cryeth in the street" —
And yet he neither heard nor saw.

WISDOM.

But one poor poet, chancing past,
Gazed with a spirit rapt and hush'd
And drank the wonder, till at last
The passion of his soul outgush'd.

‘The man is mad,” laugh’d all the land ; —
He seized his harp, he swept the string,
He wept — not his to understand —
“ My only wisdom is to sing ! ”

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

The Question.

ON one of the stars of morning
In the mist of the Milky Way,
We dream the dreams our fathers dreamt
And fade like dreams away.

The plague of the old world-question !
Let's bury it, I and you !—
Who cares, so long as a man can love,
So long as a maid is true !

THE REAL AMERICA.

The Real America.

THE Indies pay me tribute, the Andes bring me
toll,
I own no serfs but loyal hearts that kiss my kind
control!
My hands are free from slaughter, the sheath con-
ceals the sword,
I trust the regiments of Heav'n, and navies of the
Lord!
Peace is my guard and angel, her wings above me
stir,
Mine arms I reach to all the world, mine eyes I turn
to her;
Yet, ah! if honour's ensign be trampled in the dust,
With angry sorrow I must show how strife may still
be just! —
My good blade leaps her scabbard, I leave my gar-
ner'd store,
And buy a more enduring peace at the red cost of
war.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Anchorage.

THRO' mutiny and storm of battling seas
Where the blue soldiery pursues and flees,
We sail at last into such coves as these.

Here lapping ripples loiter up the beach —
A thousand lazy tongues — the sound of each
Softer than syllables of song or speech.

No snows can chill, no frosts deform the shore,
It echoes to the splash of gentlest oar,
And laughs with its warm waves for evermore.

Far from the polar coasts of glittering floes,
This is the land that, leagues and leagues from those,
Bears June upon its bosom like a rose.

Tann'd with the trade-winds, burn'd by merciless suns,
Scarr'd with the navy of unnumber'd guns
That Nature empties on her venturous sons,

Hither awhile ! where'er thy rudder steers
Over the billows of these buffeting years
Wilder than leaping blood and salt as tears !

Cast anchor, soul ! no more the brine shall sting,
Nor the wave scourge thee like a frantic thing —
Peace is this country's name, and Love its king !

THE WINGS.

The Wings.

ALL round the chamber of my heart,
At noonday or at night,
I hear the stir of would-be wings
As if they strove for flight —
And if I bend and ask,
What may these birdlings be?
I get the answer prompt as thought
Deep from the heart of me, —
They're songs, songs, songs,
That yearn to spring and soar,
And when you've given them words for wings
They'll vex your soul no more.

I hear them when I rest or ride,
And when I stand or sit, —
I catch their *beat, beat, beat,*
I hear their *flit, flit, flit.*
They keep me from my sleep,
I whisper *hush!* all day,
I hear them when the parson talks
And when he kneels to pray.
They're songs, songs, songs:
O heart! they vex us so!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

The ghosts of those dear memories
We buried long ago.

And as their downy wings
Keep fluttering in their cage,
They touch a thousand echoing strings
That never slack with age.
I answer, if a body asks,
“What may these moonings be?
Sir Fool, what be these dreams you drone
By hearth, and hill, and sea?”
They're songs, songs, songs,
The brood of deathless wings;
Your heart is still as winter boughs,
Mine sings, sings, sings!

On a Fly-leaf of Burns's Songs.

THESE are the best of him,
Pathos and jest of him ;
Earth holds the rest of him.

Passions were strong in him, —
Pardon the wrong in him ;
Hark to the song in him !--

Each little lyrical
Grave or satirical
Musical miracle !

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

♫ Ditty for May.

APRIL'S a trifter — March a churl,
June's a prodigal, all can see ;
May is a modest and winsome girl,
May is the month of months for me.
Hey ! and ho ! for the twitter and twirl,
Hints that are hanging from every tree,
Song of mavis and song of merle,
Nests that hide where you shall not see !
Winter who came with a swish and swirl,
Bluff old fool of a white-beard he —
Now lies slain with the smile of a girl —
May is the month of months for me !

THE QUEST.

The Quest.

ONCE more we launch from Fancy's coast
And pray for Fancy's gale,
"The prize is ours! is ours!" we boast,
And chase the lessening sail.
Almost, almost —
And yet, dear lads, we fail.

Our friends they drink a parting toast,
Our girls their cheeks are pale,
To ship! To ship! our restless ghost
Is calling down the trail.
Almost, almost —
And yet, dear lads, we fail.

We'll leave to them the wines and roast
Who never quaff'd the gale,
What though to-day the prize be lost,
To-morrow we prevail!
Almost, almost —
And yet, dear lads, we fail.

O sunset lure! O golden coast!
O fugitive and frail!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

We'll measure yet this Undisclosed,
For Heav'n is in the scale.

Almost, almost

We've won, who dared to fail!

WORLDSONG.

Worldsong.

HITHER, dearheart, let us both keep silence ;
 We're too tired for talking, you and I.
Let the big World babble of its sorrows,
 We will listen while the sounds go by : —

Tears that rain on unremembering faces,
 Fall of kisses upon faithless lips,
Sighs of sailors' widows gazing seaward
 Where the blue horizon dims and dips ;

Sounds of orphan-voices calling, " Mother,"
 Dry-eyed sobs that childless women know,
Moans of city-slaves, whip-driven by hunger,
 Choking tears that find no time to flow.

Sad the Song ! but perfect in its sadness.
 Hush, dear, let no happy discord fall ;
If we speak our joy it mars this music, —
 We will just keep silence, that is all.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

& Toast to Rudyard Kipling.

I.

FROM the East there came a child of fame
Like the young sun ris'n in glory,
With a look of surprise in his quizzical eyes,
And in his hand a story;
There was Dinah Shadd and Wali Dad,
Matron and maid and stripling,
There were Jakin and Lew and brown Baloo,
But the Man Who Is was Kipling.

II.

He gave us a song of a curious throng —
Fuzzy and Danny Deever,
Tomlinson, Tods, and Gobind's gods,
Findlayson, Troop, and Cleever,
Tarvin and Kate and the Black Smoke Gate,
The Reiver cure for tippling,
Vixen the dog and the Bandar-log,
But the Jungle-King was Kipling.

III.

We called him the poet who did not care,
He was cynical, jaunty, gay,

A TOAST TO RUDYARD KIPLING.

With his screw-gun mules and his Simla fools
And his pose of the boy-roué.
But the mad mood pass'd, and his foes at last
Heard a strange wild music rippling,
They dropp'd abuse with, "Who the deuce!"
But the Ones Who Know cried, "Kipling!"

IV.

From the Delville Dowd to the barracks crowd
He had known them through and through,
He mixed us a drink of blood and ink
And put his heart in the brew;
Then a glass with me to this Son of the Sea —
Matron and maid and stripling! —
From his own fierce draught the toast is quaffed:
Here's to the health of Kipling!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

One Old Veteran.

HIS tears, unfailling, stored for instant flow,
 Though eyes are brimmed with fun,
Hair putting on the colour of the foe,
 Leg lame — he has but one ;

Ready for joke or sermon, little loath
 To saintliness or sin ;
His trembling fingers pulling at the growth
 Framing his grizzled chin ;

With pipe in mouth and self-important look
 Beneath his great slouch hat ; —
He seems a print dropp'd from some antique book
 Our childhood wondered at.

And yet those eyes once blazed with fiercer fire
 Than wrapp'd his musket's mouth,
When he strode forth, clothed with a just man's ire,
 Slave-summon'd, to the South.

So, while above his wrinkles drifts the snow,
 Remember with awed breath
His tann'd face set tow'rd destiny and the foe,
 And that red game with Death !

PROLOGUE TO A BOOK OF COLLEGE VERSE.

Prologue to a Book of College Verse.

I N "Cap and Gown" you look in vain
For epic or heroic strain.
Not ours to scale the heights sublime,
Which hardly masters dare to climb;
We only sing of youth and joy,
And love, — the credo of the boy!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Life the Mystery.

WHENCESOEVER comes this wonder,
From whatever far-off place, —
From dim caves the dark seas under, —
From the Overblue's embrace,
Whether down the paths of morning
Fly its feet o'er farm and hill,
Whether yellow sunset holds it —
Noondays, or the twilight still ; —
All we really know is, dearie, —
While the mystery broods above,
Tho' the wise may doubt and differ —
Life is sweet, for life is love !

Science aches to solve the wonder,
Ploughs the gray hills, drains the brooks,
Scans the sky at night for plunder,
Ravages a thousand books ;
Poets dream and sages question
Till the mumbling lips are dry,
Deaf the ears and blurred the vision,
And the years burn out and die.
Let them prate and perish, dearie,
Foolish wisemen with their strife,
Wheresoe'er or whencesoever
Life is sweet, for love is life !

IN THE PAUSES OF THE RAIN.

In the Pauses of the Rain.

"In the pauses of the rain." — *Mrs. Browning*

IN the pauses of the rain
How the great boughs bend and strain!
How the tongueless trees awake!
How the big drops break — and break,
With a plashing, sullen sound,
From the low eaves to the ground!
How the witless winds complain!

All the castled shores of Spain
Fade from fancy; they were born
'Neath the breeze and blue of morn; —
Now the North wind, shod with sleet,
Leaves his print of wizard feet,
Making mock, upon the pane!

Lo, the fields of wind-swept grain! —
Penitently prone, — as where
A great church is swept by prayer,
Till the bowed hearts find release
In the pardon and the peace.
Ah, that Memory were as kind!
Ah, that Peace could shrive the mind!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

But these gray hours leave a trace
Of lost years — a face! — a face!
And I tremble, and I start
At a something near my heart
Like the ghost of a dead pain,
And lips yearn, and arms are fain
In the pauses of the rain.

GRAPES.

Grapes.

I KNOW a vineyard whither feasters throng —
More clusters cling there than are told in song,
And, oh, the wine is strong!

Some find it cloying sweet — some say it stings;
And purple dyes on rosy feet it flings
Where boyhood treads and sings.

Big globing grapes hang heavy to the hand,
Laden with liquor youth can understand —
Dangerous, soothing, bland.

And huge, green, broad-veined leaves grow rank
above,
And shade hot cheeks more delicate than a dove,—
Stained with the wine of Love.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Ⓔ *Funeral.*

IN the darkness and chill of the night,
Not a star overhead,
With a face that was hopeless and white,
She buried her dead.

No ritual heard by the bier
Save a faint wailing cry —
The litany low of a tear,
The prayer of a sigh.

And she planted no flowers above
In the silence and gloom :
For he whom she buried was Love,
And her breast was the tomb.

A SONG FOR SIMPLICITY.

A Song for Simplicity.

A ROSE will wither, so will love,
When love grows overwise.
Keep all thy petals, O my heart,
Whil the short summer flies!

Let gladness be their gentle sun,
And innocence their dew,
Ask the warm April rain to fall,
And wash all care from you.

And if love went the truant way
And you have lost his track,
Be faithful to simplicity
And you shall win him back.

Hush! the soft fingers of desire
Tap at the stoic will;
Be very simple, O my heart,
And love will enter still.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Ⓐ *Wish.*

○ SANDAL-FOOTED years, soft stealing by
With the swift cunning of a thievish band,
Snatch what of youth you have already spared;
I mock your thefts, I leave my latch upraised
And proudly bid you enter — plunder all!
But ere ye go, one guerdon. There's a girl
Whose hair holds gold that must have waked your
greed,
For it has caught the coinage of the sun
Within its meshes. Years, I pray you spare
The beauty that holds court within her eyes
And on her brow — her lips. O gently pass,
And lay a few more roses in her hand!

YESTERDAY.

Yesterday.

THOU art to me like all the days, —
They ebb and flow with punctual tides,
Leave driftwood, wreckage, on the sand,
Perhaps a shell besides;
Swift, incommunicable, vast,
They poise, then perish in the Past.

And yet I have not all forgot
Those years when every day seemed long —
A separate age of joys and play,
Of wonder-tales and song :
I marvel, Yesterday, to know
Thou still art Childhood's Long Ago !

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

A Humble Wish.

OF Heav'n I ask a hand's-breadth only,
Enough of the infinite floor of blue,
The amethyst pavement large and lonely,
To carve a cameo-rhyme or two.

I ask for the poet's smithcraft merely,
The wonderful, artless, old-world way
Of carving the jewels of verse sincerely
Till facets flash where the sunbeams play.

Oh, the rhymer's nice art, rare yet reckless,
Casting its diamonds under your feet,
Polishing gems for a gay girl's necklace,
Tossing a song in the dust of the street!

Give me the skill that seems so careless,
The perfectly delicate disarray
Of surface and hue that are fresh and wearless,
That shine till the locks of Time are gray!

ROYALTY.

Royalty.

I N purple and fine linen
My country farmhouse shines,
The purple on the lilacs —
The linen on the lines.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

& March Mood.

O SOUL, why art so restless?
What ails thee? Quiet, fool! —
The branches, bare and nestless,
Hang o'er the ruffled pool;

November leaves still languish
Above a frozen sod, —
So lie our hopes — our anguish,
Upon the breast of God.

We pray, nor are forgiven;
We lose all, lacking faith;
We raise void hands to Heaven
And only clasp — a wraith.

Ah nay! Each prayer one utters —
Tho' one be blind — shall bring
Its answer — Look! here flutters
The earliest bird of Spring!

LOST KNOWLEDGE.

Lost Knowledge.

I KNOW not, Life, what thou may'st be, —
I only know thou art, to me,
A challenge and a mystery.

But once — oh, once! — (the heav'n was blue
Yet clasped a haloed moon) — a few
Brief moments 'neath the stars — I *knew*.

There rose a light breeze from the west, —
It blew her hair against my breast,
And closer still our lips were prest!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

To a Young Poet.

WOULD'ST thou be that man of fate
Whom the eager years await? —
The elect, the son of song,
Earth has travailed for so long?

Strip then from thy life the sham,
Let *I seem* become *I am* ;
Though thy naked soul be shown
Starved, yes, shrivelled to a bone, —
Honest Nature, only so,
Will consent to bid it grow,
Honest Love can only thus
Feed it from her overplus ;
Honest Genius thus alone
Can adopt thee for her own.

STEPS TOWARD FAITH

L. of C.

THE COMEDY.

The Comedy.

"Life's poor play." — *Essay on Man.*

BEHOLD the rising curtain! It foretells
A time-worn comedy: the laughter gay,
The joke, the jangle of the jester's bells,
And all the painted pageant of the play.

We'll take our parts: you with your velvet gown
My lady — I with homespun suit of gray;
Now, boy, remember *you* must know the town
And act the rake — and so, begins the play.

Jest and be merry! 'Tis an easy task.
Come, fellow-actors! let us all be gay!
Though eyes be tearful 'neath the merry mask,
Come, let us laugh! for we must play the play.

Close by your side the unseen Prompter stands;
Fear not, he whispers what is yours to say;
His name is Destiny, and in his hands
He holds the Author's copy of the play.

Then paint the laughing wrinkles 'neath your eyes —
Assume your rôle; shall we prove cowards? Nay!
Though hearts be breaking 'neath the fair disguise,
Come, let us laugh! for thus we act the play,

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Which runs through many a jovial scene, nor stops
Until the glaring footlights fade away:
The darkness falls — the viewless curtain drops —
The roisterers sleep — and finished is the play.

A MOOD OF RESTLESS SPRING.

Ⓐ Mood of Restless Spring.

THE slow days pass: the sunshine and the rain,
The toilsome task, the pain.

The weary nights when silence longs for speech —
They vanish each by each.

The ordered march goes on — the punctual years —
Health, harvest, laughter, tears.

Day, night, eve, morrow, waking hours and sleep,
Their long succession keep.

There are who say that in a distant clime
Above our Space — our Time,

In pathless lands beyond a shoreless sea,
Heaven joins the worlds that be.

Clasp close the hope — and yet from Heaven or Hell
Has one come back to tell?

We only *know* that pain shall some day cease
In Death's deep dreamless peace.

Meanwhile here is our earth, and here — To-day;
And Spring has given us May.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

These Our Lives.

FOREGATHERED from the Darkness,
By the Seven Winds brought nigh,
We shrivel to these spirit-shapes
That whisper, "Thou," and "I."

Across the desert's mocking face
We form a phantom train —
A caravan of shadows
That press the sands of pain !

In the Feasting Hall.

THE banqueters arrayed about the board
 Make merry with the goodly meat and wine, —
“Cupbearer, haste! and fetch from out thy hoard
 Another draught to cheer us as we dine.

“And thou shalt know the liquor by its brand,
 That dusty label bears the one word, ‘Joy,’ —
So shall we hold a potion in our hand
 The maddest of the night, — and pledge thee, boy!”

“But, masters, ye have drunken all of this,
 And now alone remains the wine called ‘Pain,’
It is as old a vintage; and, I wis,
 (Tho’ sour of taste) ’twill cool and calm your brain.

“Beside, our Lord hath saved it for each guest,
 And would ye scorn his gift who bade you dine?
Yea, some have whispered, where those grapes were
 prest,
 That One of royal blood hath trod the wine.”

They drink and pledge; but paler grow the lips,
 The jest dies mirthless with the laugh and boast;
The guests dash down the cups of joy’s eclipse,
 And, drunken-eyed, stare helpless at the Host.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Earth-mother.

WRINKLED mother, at your knee
Let me sit with questions three.

Tell me why this truth is true :
Man is not as glad as you? —
Why my foolish fret must jar
On the peace of Things that Are?

Tell me, is this worm within
Gender'd by the thing called Sin?
Books say so, but is it that
Or something never hinted at?

Lastly, mother, I would know
When you hold me close below
If that long sleep be like ours
Or as wakeless as a flower's.

Wrinkled mother, answer me,
If you can, my questions three !

MYSTERIES.

Mysteries.

PLANTS, with their vulgar roots
Clutching some clod,
Thrusting divinest blooms
Upward to God,
Sentient in every stem,
Leaves and the life of them;

Wings in the azure world,
Worms in the green: —
Read me these mysteries!
What may they mean?
Baffled, my spirit clings
Deaf at the door of things.

Read me the riddle, Life!
Fain would I know
All the intrigue of it,
Secret and show! —
Death with his stricken wings,
Life, and Death's deathless things!

Far up yon steps of light
On toward the sun!

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Climb the fierce path of Truth,
All shall be won ;
Yea, though thy heart of care
Faint on that fiery stair !

FEAR.

Fear.

I FEAR not grief ; life's tangled web appears
Of plainer texture through the lens of tears.

Nor death's chill frost ; no green boughs dance as
fleet
As dead leaves swept thro' some November street.

Nor life's long paths, though none may comprehend,
Or whence they wind or whitherward they wend.

Nor clouds and fog ; if hills be drunk with mist,
I only grasp my staff with firmer fist.

One thing I fear, — that when the years shall pass
Stern Time may reap my courage like the grass.

Oh, if his scythe prove keener than my will,
Sharpen that latter, Lord, to match his skill,

And to my coward conscience make this clear :
I have no other foe to fear save Fear.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Remedy.

ONCE, wearied of these feverish moods,
I started for the healing woods.

Behind me, echoed through the street
The dreams of youth with following feet.

Before me like a flock there flew
My wishes, straight across the blue.

Within mine ear, "Do thus, and thus,"
Care sighing plead, solicitous.

When lo! upon my heart there fell
The bird-choir's vesper canticle: —

Deep, deep, within the leafy hush,
The love-lay of the hermit-thrush,

The oven-bird's didactic note,
The witch-tales of the yellowthroat,

And, drifting faint from farther still,
A song that made the silence thrill,

The veery's! — I once more grew glad,
Such grace those guileless singers had!

Once more I heard Faith's faint wings stir,
And all my heart went out to her.

SOMEWHILE.

Somewhile.

SOMEWHILE, somewhere, my heart shall come
Back to its country and its home ;

A prodigal and stranger there,
All stripp'd and beggar'd, spent and bare.

It ask'd for life, and in its need
Was given (Oh, swinish husk!) a creed.

It ask'd its dole of daily bread,
And groaned to gain a stone instead.

But on the far horizon, see
The dust of feet that seek for thee!

Ah, soon shall dawn the Father's smile ;
Have patience, Heart : — Somewhere, somewhile !

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Miracles.

NOW from those futile, fabulous dreams of old
We slumberers wake, — no more the toys of
gold.

Nor on Olympus nor on Sinai now
Man kneels with that lorn wonder on his brow,
No more appeases with fear's grudging gifts
Jove and Jehovah till their vengeance lifts;
Hyssop and cedar-wood and purple veils
Are playthings in forgotten children's tales.
Yet, ye who wait for those calm suns to rise
That kiss'd our sires, when, to their awestruck eyes,
Mirage and miracle made white the skies,
Know, reverent skeptics, plighted to the truth,
That miracles persist in solemn sooth; —
This violet I scan when Spring's astir —
Shy beauty, sweet to the blue heart of her —
If I could solve her secret I should pluck
All meaner mysteries bare; these roots that suck
From some black soil the pigments that will paint
A rose's cheek or make the senses faint
With lilac or syringa — solve me these,
And I will read what miracles you please.

VALUES.

Values.

WHEN child to mother brings his loud distress,
If some rude playmate's blow has wrought
him pain,
A soft, strong hand smooths back each golden tress
And bids him smile again.

"Mother has known more wrong and grief than
thou,"

The sad voice says, "but see, I do not cry,"—
Till wonder calms the boy's uplifted brow
And wide astonished eye.

So we pray bitter prayers: "They bring me loss;
Lord, hast Thou seen what these my foes have
done?"

Till comes reply the infinite realms across:
"Yea, and these slew my Son."

What Then ?

IF you have lost the art of being happy,
Which childhood, without learning, knew so well,
What then? Waste life in striving to interpret
That secret cipher only Heav'n can spell?
Our little day of Time was lent for service,
Eternity is long enough for joy,
Take Sorrow to your heart and bear your burden,
Leave rapture to an angel — and a boy.

A PRAYER OF ONE OF GOD'S CHILDREN.

Ⓐ Prayer of One of God's Children.

○ THOU to whom our faltering faiths aspire,
We nowise love Thee as Incarnate Law,
Or see Thee as the strenuous Hebrew saw —
A Pillar of Cloud by day, by night of Fire ;
Our faith is simpler, we would venture nigher,
Press close, and clasp Thy feet, and weep, and draw
The comfort of Thy smile, and lose our awe,
Assured Thou wilt not mock a child's desire.

O impotence and sacrilege of creeds !
Philacteries, rituals, priest-craft — what are they !
My heart — her root in prayer, her bloom in deeds, —
Would humbly toward God's daylight urge her way,
But only Thou can'st bring to birth the seeds,
Or quicken with Thy smile the inert clay.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

If Only.

IF we could only frame one guess,
Or with our poor faith plumb
The sea beside whose waves we wait,
Dreaming, and lost, and dumb,---

Ah, who against that shoreless deep
Would weigh our mist of tears:—
The ocean of Eternity,
The little cloud of years.

Ocean and Bay.

TIME is a land-locked bay
Joining that great sea
Called in our charts Eternity;
Foolish and blinded they
Who grope around the shore,
Drop plummet, measure, guess,
Hazard: "A few blue leagues, not more,
Then mist and nothingness."

The winds bring inland from the deep
Smells that are salt as tears,
Green waves rock every boat to sleep
Deeper than all our years; —
And other hints there be: — the words
Of distant sailors' cries,
Some whiter wing than bears our birds;
Mirage that swims the skies;
Still on the fragile decks the lips
Complain, "Perchance there be
Some outlet from this bay for ships
To gain a shoreless sea,
Sail-swept and fathomless and fair,
Where the great vessels ride; —

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Ah, who can know!" They sigh, and stare
Upon their mimic tide.
Yet, strong as angels' arms, the sea,
Upon the neighbouring strand,
Arrays its white-plumed chivalry
And charges on the sand;
And sometimes to a daring soul
High on the bending mast,
Hand shading eyes, the splendours roll
At last, at last.

“OPEN UNTO THEIR CRY.”

“Open unto Their Cry.”

AGAINST the Throne like music rare
Pulses the anguish of a prayer,
And spirit-waves of sound are stirred
By sorrow sobbing into word.

If with the phrase of culture fraught,
Or stammered by a tongue untaught,
Since Love is Love, it matters not.

Breathe thou thy want, and, in His ear,
No harper, harping e'er so clear,
Can drown the little song of fear.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

The Way Home.

THE sunbeam and the dark,
Vesper and matin bells ;
The greeting hands of yesterday ;
The morrow, and farewells.

The cradle and the morn,
The eve and ebbing sense ;
And who shall tell us whither,
And who shall say from whence ?

Behind us lies the void,
Before us is the dark ;
As on the slender boat of Time
We tremblingly embark.

By sun — by stars — we sail
And tempt the desperate sea ;
We only know our vessel's prow
Is toward eternity.

The sunbeam and the dark,
Vesper and matin bells ;
The greeting hands in yonder port,
But in the earth, farewells.

PARDON'S CROWN.

Pardon's Crown.

SUCCESS is always crowned : Paul, Shakespeare,
Lincoln —

These have their wreaths and marbles, — saint, bard,
hero.

But what save curses do we give the vanquish'd?
What crowns hath Failure ?

Can brows that crime hath blacken'd hold a chap-
let ?

What of the man who falls in life's hot battle
Trampled and rent? What crowns have Ananias,
Herod or Judas ?

Others may hate them ; let me dare to love them :
Crown those with laurel ; I crown these with par-
don ;

Poor lost, sad, ignorant souls ! — I cry with Jesus,
“ Father, forgive them ! ”

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

& Thanksgiving.

I THANK Thee, Lord, for cloudy weather,
We soon would tire of blue ;
I thank Thee, Lord, for Pain, our brother,
Whose rude care holds us true.

I thank Thee for the weary morrow
That makes the Past more sweet ;
I thank Thee for our sister, Sorrow,
Who leads us to Thy feet.

ABOVE EVERY NAME.

Above Every Name.

THE idle tides of Time toss names like these :
Troy, Babylon, Hector, Jove, Hesperides —
Forgotten spindrift of unmemoried seas.

Golden in fancy they ; they live, and yet
While our lips say the words our lips forget,
They leave our hearts unwarm'd, our cheeks unwet.

One Name alone can move us in those deeps
Where love of child, of wife, of honour sleeps —
Down where the virgin Soul her vigil keeps.

O humble Son of Mary, once again
Make Thou a manger in our hearts, and when
Proud names have gleam'd and gone, speak Thou!
Amen.

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

Joy's Pilgrim.

“**P**RYTHEE, where farest thou, over these wilds? —
Brother, thy face is as glad as a child's ;
Weary and footsore from cockcrow to night,
Still thou art fed by some hidden delight ;
Bleeding and dust-cover'd, yet in thine eyes
What is this rapture that dares and defies?
Whence art thou journeying — where dost thou
roam?”
“ Faith is my fatherland, Love is my home ! ”

CHRIST THE RISEN.

Christ the Risen.

EASTER, 1899.

BY the ointment and the spice,—
Sacrament and sacrifice,
By the aloes and the myrrh,
Watch, and seal, and sepulchre,
Weeping three and shining Twain,
Linen strewn where Love had lain;
By the Voice that roused the clay
And the rock It breathed away,
By the quickening Something drawn
From the heights behind the dawn
Making whole and setting free,—
Jesus, we would rise with Thee!

When our patient spirit knows
Only shadows and repose,
When above our narrow cot
Friends may lean yet clasp us not,
When no voice of girl or lad
Makes our darkened chamber glad,
When above us April stirs
Yet our hearts are not with hers,
Heed Thou then this prayer and plea:
“Master, we would rise with Thee!”

ON LIFE'S STAIRWAY.

If we tremble at the touch
Which we need — O Christ! so much;
If our own hands hew the cave,
Wind the linen, seal the grave;
In our ears, grown deaf with doubt,
Whisper, till our faith is stout!
Flash upon our holden eyes
All that First-day of surprise!
Smooth with this our anxious brow: —
Christ the Risen rises now;
Lo, the Easter heart each day
Sees the great stone rolled away,
Hears the Message: “Weep not ye, —
Children, ye be risen with Me!”

THE END.



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